

OAK-LEAF HYDRANGEA, HYDRANGEA QUERCIFOLIA,
A NATIVE SHRUB USEFUL AS AN ORNAMENTAL

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INTRODUCTION: The genus Hydrangea contains about 23 species, several of which are grown as ornamentals (1,2). Notable among these are the French or blue hydrangea, H. macrophylla (Thunb.) Ser., grown both as a yard and a pot plant; hills-of-snow, H. arborescens L. 'Grandiflora', a white flowered shrub; and the P. G. hydrangea, H. paniculata Siebold 'Grandiflora', a white flowered large shrub or small tree.

Hydrangea quercifolia Bartr., the oak-leaf hydrangea, is native throughout the Southeastern United States (3,4), including much of Florida. It is a large shrub to 6 ft (2 m) tall, or sometimes in cultivation in Florida, to 10 ft (3 m) tall and often twice as wide. The plant is easily propagated by cuttings or by suckers or offsets from underground runners. The large clusters of white flowers (fig. 1) produced in the early summer are quite showy and make the shrub very attractive. These flowers, as they age, turn from white to pinkish to bronze, and eventually to tan as they weather.



Fig. 1. Hydrangea quercifolia

DESCRIPTION: Spreading shrub to 6 ft (2 m) tall; twigs densely pubescent with reddish brown to white hairs, older twigs and branches with thin, reddish brown bark exfoliating in shaggy strips. Leaves deciduous, opposite, blades 4-12 in. (10-30 cm) long and nearly as broad, deeply 3-7 lobed, the lobes again lobed or serrate with sharp teeth, apex of lobes acute or acuminate, sinuses rounded to angled, base of blade rounded to truncate, often somewhat decurrent onto petiole, upper surface dull green, nearly glabrous, lower surface paler, densely wooly, petiole 1/2-1/5 as long as blade, densely wooly with white to reddish brown hairs. Flowers May-June in large terminal showy panicle 4-12 in. (10-30 cm) long, rachis stout, pubescent, peduncles erect or ascending, 2-4 in. (5-10 cm), pedicels slender 1/16-1/8 in. (2-4 mm), flowers of 2 types, small fertile and large, showy sterile flowers, sterile flowers on outer part of inflorescence, rays 4, petal-like, 1/2-1 1/2 in. (13-40 mm), orbicular to obovate, at first white turning reddish or purplish, fertile flowers with 5 petals, 1-2 mm long, oblong, greenish white, stamens 8-10, exerted, filaments filiform, ovary inferior, 2-4 celled, stigmas 2, sessile, divergent, ovules numerous (1,2,3,4).

USES AND CULTURE: Uses for oak-leaf hydrangea include specimen plants where space is adequate, or as an untrimmed hedge or background where screening is desired. Plants become too large for foundation plantings, but in other situations where some restriction of size is important, plants can be cut back considerably in the fall. Even with such trimming they become rather large.

The oak-leaf hydrangea grows best in moist, fertile, light, well drained soil (4). It, however, will tolerate soils ranging from moderately dry, well drained sand to moist, heavy clay loam soil with adequate surface drainage. It grows well in light shade, but flowers best in full sun. In Florida it is adapted best to central and northern parts of the state.

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